(iv) For subscribers of fixed lines in rural areas, the Charges are lower than those in urban areas. No such concession is given in the case of mobile telephones.

(v) STD and ISD tariffs have greatly decreased due to TRAI's decisions and competition between service providers.

(c) The Government no longer fixes tariffs for telephones services. The power of fixing tariffs for various telecom services is now mandated to TRAI under the TRAI Act, and the TRAI along with the competition between service providers now determine the tariff.

V.P.T. facility by BSNL

226. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, a Public Sector Enterprise, is being entrusted the responsibility of providing Village Public Telephone facility throughout the country;

(b) if so, the number of village in the country which would be provided with this facility;

(c) whether a time-frame has been chalked out for this task; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (d) Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) is providing the Village Public Telephones (VPTs) throughout the country except in those to be provided by private Basic Service Operators and BSNL has accordingly drawn up plans to provide VPTs in the remaining 34,469 villages of its share by 2003-2004.

Licenses to private companies for deployment of village phones

227. SHRI C. O. POULOSE:
SHRI V. V. RAGHAVAN:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the private basic phone companies were awarded

licenses with the obligations to deploy one lakh village phones in three years;

(b) if so, whether these private companies have since fulfilled this obligation; if so, the details thereof alongwith the number of VPTs provided, so far, by these companies; and

(c) if answer to part (b) be in negative, the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) As against the commitment to provide 97806 Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in first three years of their licence, the private basic telephone service licensees have reported to have provided 4252 VPTs by 31st October, 2002. The Government has permitted them to meet their unfulfilled commitments by the end of December, 2002 against submission of Performance Bank Guarantees and Deed of Guarantees towards such unfulfilled obligations.

Laying of submarine cable link between Visakhapatnam and Kuala Lumpur

228. SHRI K. KALAVENKAT RAO: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether a proposal to lay submarine cable link from Visakhapatnam to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia has been finalised;

(b) what benefits would accrue to the country from this project; and

(c) by when this cable link is likely to be functional?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) A proposal to set up a submarine cable landing station at Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh was submitted in April, 2001 by M/s. Astro Network India Private Limited proposing Vishakhapatnam and Penang (Malaysia) as terminal stations.